

March XX 2012

Dear Chairman Leahy and Ranking Member Graham:

We are writing to urge you to strongly support international basic education programs in the FY 2013 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations bill. Through robust funding of basic education, we can help alleviate poverty through economic growth, build markets for U.S. exports, enhance stability and security, and promote effective development across sectors.

Improving the education of the world's poor is not only a humanitarian and moral imperative, it is critical to our own economic interests by widening opportunities for trade and commerce, lifting nations out of poverty, and spurring economic growth. Today, the fastest-growing markets for America's goods are in developing countries, representing 40% of U.S. exports and one out of every five American jobs. As populations around the world continue to rapidly grow and the U.S. economy continues to struggle, education programs will help to expand the U.S. consumer base in the developing world and build the stable trading partners that growing U.S. export markets require.

In these increasingly complex and dangerous times, the U.S. must proactively work to ensure that children and a burgeoning youth population are learning in school, so they are better able to make good choices and participate in the economic and political life of their country. By 2050, there will be 1.2 billion youth around the world -- with nine out of ten living in developing countries. Many of the world's children and youth today are uneducated, marginalized and without hope for gainful employment. They are more susceptible to extremist ideologies that threaten not only the stability of their own countries, but U.S. national security interests as well. Our efforts to counteract this message and give hope to millions of disenfranchised youth through comprehensive basic education will directly impact the chances of success for these and other countries beset by conflict and unrest and also help protect American lives.

Perhaps most importantly, education promotes effective and sustainable development. In many countries, the school is the center of the community and can serve an important role in facilitating other development efforts, such as global health and food security. In addition, quality education has been shown to lower child and maternal mortality rates, increase life expectancy, and significantly decrease vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and other deadly diseases. For example, young people who have completed primary education are roughly half as likely to contract HIV and AIDS as those with little or no education. A recent study found that half of the reduction of child mortality, totaling 4.2 million lives saved over the past 40 years, was due to better education of women. In fact, mounting evidence shows that educating girls is one of the most cost-effective ways to spur development, creating a ripple effect throughout society.

For these reasons, we urge your Subcommittee to strongly support international basic education programs in the fiscal year 2013 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations bill. We appreciate your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,